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Published in:
Ikke angivet

Publication date:
2003

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pristed, H. B. (2003). The Concept of Identity in Academic Discourse. In *Ikke angivet* Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University.

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The Concept of Identity in Academic Discourse

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the question of how the idea of identity is conceptualised in different contexts. As such, it grapples with themes mentioned under the first workshop heading 'Conceptualising "culture" and "identity" in Multiculturalism'. With the field of humanities as background, a critique of the prevalent notion of identity within this area will be offered, and it will be pointed out why it is important to raise awareness of the 'competing diagnoses of the stuff that requires recognition'. The conclusion is not that we should resist the language of identity and culture altogether, but rather that we should be aware of the different power struggles going on within these discourses.

The paper takes a critical look on how the concept of identity is presented in current academic discourse, particularly discourses surrounding cultural analysis. It presents a view from the cultural critic Stuart Hall – here taken to be representative of a number of theorists within the field – and conducts a critical examination of it. This is done through references to the conceptual history of 'personal identity', which will help shed light on the conference question of whether there is a need for sustained conceptual innovation aided by conceptual history.

The aim is to show that representations or conceptualisations of identity by no means are value-free. On the contrary, it is possible, in the vein of Michel Foucault, to trace hidden power relations within the many discourses in which the concept of personal identity plays a significant role. The aim is to raise awareness about these power relations, and hence hopefully enable participants in these discourses to conduct themselves more skillfully through such conceptual labyrinths. In this way, the argument of the paper carries general interest, as it can in principle be applied to any investigation of contested concepts.

Working under the broad headline 'What's the Culture in Multiculturalism? What's the Difference of Identities?', I am in the present paper going to seize mainly on the concept of identity, particularly personal identity. But even if the focus of the paper is somewhat narrow in this sense, the discussion of the concept of personal identity will evolve around such general lines that the critical approach reached here should be applicable to other concepts within the overall debate over multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is of course a currently heavily debated issue, and it is also a debate that takes place within a variety of academic discourses. The issue itself is very complicated, involving both moral, political, economic, cultural and many other aspects. In this vein it should perhaps be noted here that the starting point for the present paper lies within the general field of humanities, more specifically cultural theory. This obviously informs and colours the analysis developed here, but it is my hope and belief that there are so many interdisciplinary cross-purposes within the field of multiculturalism that my analysis should also carry general interest for the overall debate.

My basic claim, or the premiss for my entire conceptual investigation, is that the concept of identity is a contested one within a number of academic fields in which this term plays a central role. Be that sociology, philosophy, cultural studies or literary analysis. Identity is often – more or less indirectly – the central issue around which debates evolve, and hence it is important to look at what this concept actually implies. The paper is a result of an interdisciplinary investigation of the concept of identity, and as such it is a hybrid product reflecting a diversified interest in a variety of academic fields. The aim is to show how different disciplines such as philosophy, cultural studies, sociology and literary criticism might profitably cross-fertilise one another when it comes to a critical understanding of important concepts within each discipline.

I shall start by taking a close look at how the issue of personal identity is presented in a currently popular theory within cultural studies, studying the arguments and premisses this view rests on. The concept of personal identity has changed its connotation significantly over especially the past four centuries, and this has had vast cultural, literary and sociological implications, opening up spaces of struggle within those fields. The question remains what the sociologists, politicians, anthropologists, authors, literary critics etc. are really struggling over.

A central name within the debate surrounding the word ‘identity’ is that of the cultural critic Stuart Hall. One of his key articles on the concept of identity is entitled ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’¹. I shall present Hall’s text as a central example of the discourse about personal identity currently dominant especially within the fields of sociology, cultural theory and literature, and take a close look at the arguments on which it is built. In this article, Hall propounds a view that appears to be rather typical of cultural analysts. In the article he says that ‘...in what is sometimes called our post-modern world, we are also “post” any fixed or essentialists conceptions of identity’ (p.275). On the very first page of his article Hall says that ‘This chapter ... is written from a position basically sympathetic to the claim that modern identities are being de-centred’ (p.274). It is this basic premiss of the text I wish to question. It is undeniably a position which many theorists hold, but by pointing out some of the weaknesses in the arguments following from this premiss, and also pointing out some of the inferred premisses you have to subscribe to by such a view, I hope to be able to show that holding the position that ‘modern identities are being de-centred’ is not as straightforward and unproblematic as much current writing would have us think.

The basic argument of Hall’s article is thus that the concept of personal identity has changed over the past centuries. This almost evolutionary ‘development view’, as I shall term it, is well captured in Hall’s statement that

The main focus of this ...is conceptual. It is concerned with the *changing conceptions* of the human subject as a discursive figure, whose unified form and rational identity, I shall argue, were presupposed by, and essential to, both the discourses of modern thought and the processes which shaped modernity (p.281).

Hall identifies this change as beginning with Descartes, and his claim is that in these postmodern times (or 'late-modern' as he prefers to term it) we might as well replace the concept of identity with that of identification. My counterargument will unfold as an attempt to show that Hall's use of the history of philosophy as a premiss in a development view of the concept of personal identity hardly makes for a tenable argument.

The basic structure of Stuart Hall's article is determined by what he sees as the three stages of development towards our present conception of identity. These three stages he defines as 1) the Enlightenment subject, 2) the sociological subject, and 3) the postmodern subject. This 'conceptual development'-view, is by no means confined to this particular article by Hall, rather it is a very basic view underlying many of his texts, and, as I shall return to later, also the assumptions of many other theorists.

But I should like to stay with Hall's article for a while, because I find it such a clear example of a conception of identity apparently endorsed by most cultural and literary critics today, as well as sociologists. What strikes me as most peculiar about this view is that no one seems to raise an eyebrow at the suggestion that 'in these postmodern times we might as well replace the concept of identity with that of identification'. To me this seems a highly suspect metaphysical substitution. To begin with, there surely has to be *someone* to do the identifying. Identification requires an agent. If identity is *only* a matter of identification, we seem to involve ourselves in an argument of infinite regress, which is clearly a self-defeating position.

This is not to deny that the concept of identification may have a more central role to play today than it had four hundred years ago – I cannot be the judge of that etymological question – but only to point out that to juxtapose identity and identification would be to misunderstand the conceptual history of 'identity'. To support this view, I should like to venture briefly into a few historical positions on the issue of identity, here limiting myself to the views of Descartes, Locke and Hobbes, whom Hall also refers to in his article. Briefly described, these three philosophers *do* present a certain form of development in their understanding of the concept of identity. But it is my claim that rather than regarding this as a kind of evolutionary ontology, this development should be explained as a change of discourse and emphasis when it comes to the idea of identity. This claim finds a strong support, I would suggest, when one considers the contexts in which these philosophers discuss the concept of identity. Descartes does this in his *Meditationes*, which are just what they

sound like: solitary meditations over the question of being. Hobbes, on the other hand, writes his *Leviathan* about the proper organisation of society, and hence he considers man as part of a larger context, in which he has a *role* to play.² So when Hall presents this list of philosophers as an indication of a development towards a more malleable concept of identity, I would say that he simply mistakes a discursive change for an ontological one.

Going back to the name of Stuart Hall, one might ask, then, where it is that his argument fails in its consistency. When he claims that in these postmodern or late-modern times identity has merely become a question of identification, what is it that he has misunderstood? I said that Hall mentions Descartes as the starting point of the modern preoccupation with and conception of personal identity. I find it undeniable that Descartes' ideas have had a huge impact on the modern conception of man and identity. But when Stuart Hall lists Descartes, as he does, as one of the founding fathers of the modern subject, I would say that he has misunderstood a very essential premiss in the way Descartes argues in his *Meditationes* from 1641, where the most famous conclusion is 'cogito ergo sum'. What is perhaps less familiar is the importance of the working method Descartes uses in this book. Descartes was of course a rationalist, and as such he was looking for ultimate answers to the great questions of philosophy. This working method or approach to philosophy finds notable expression in the title of one of his other works, namely *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences*, from 1637.

It is this approach that distinguishes the rationalist Descartes from a late-modern theorist such as Stuart Hall and others who endorse similar ideas. Hall correctly identifies Descartes as taking his starting point in a universal scepticism in the meditations, but he seems to forget that this is merely Descartes' method of countering this scepticism. The *cogito*, which is the basic finding of the meditations, is exactly Descartes' expression of a *non*-sceptical solution to the question of being. Today Descartes' book is often referred to as the precursor for modern preoccupations with self-consciousness, because of the 'cogito' solution, and it is indeed possible to regard his findings as bearing ultimate insight on this issue. But this is not how Descartes himself would regard the issue. To him it is a question of finding the answer to the ontological question of personal identity, and epistemology only carries secondary interest, although one could argue that he in his choice of setting - with the meditations conducted in a cozy chair in front of a fireplace - points towards the important epistemological aspects of his findings.

But this is only a later development; at the time Descartes could have had no idea that he was instigating what was later to be called the subjective turn in philosophy. His main concern was

ontological, and it is here that the major difference between him and a thinker like Stuart Hall becomes most apparent. Because when Stuart Hall for example calls Descartes ‘the father of the modern subject’, it is an indication of a total lack of understanding of Descartes’ project on the behalf of Hall. Descartes would have been horrified by this proposal, the term ‘the modern subject’ would be totally misplaced from his point of view, as he is exactly trying to find the timeless ultimate answer to the ontological question of being. Descartes certainly has not sired the subject, he has only – in his own view – found the answer to what the subject is, and the entire idea that the subject is something with a history and hence something that changes over time, would be totally incomprehensible to the rationalist Descartes.

In this way I find it highly conspicuous when a modern thinker such as Stuart Hall, and for that matter many other contemporary theorists, refer to Descartes as any kind of ideological forerunner to present day relationalist views on what personal identity is or consists in. I do not think that these views are in any way compatible, and when Hall later traces the conceptual history of personal identity through the ideas of for example John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, George Herbert Mead, Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand Saussure and Michel Foucault, I do not think the error becomes any less aggravating. My objection runs to the effect that these theorists and ways of conceptualising the concept of personal identity are mutually incompatible. I am certainly not denying that the way we think and talk about the concept of personal identity has shifted significantly during the past few centuries, perhaps, as Hall says, all the way from Descartes’ publication of his *Meditationes*. But even if the *discourse* has changed, this does not imply that the concept itself has also changed. A change in discourse only changes the rules within which the concept is discussed, it does not automatically change the ontological constitution of the subject of that discourse.

When Hall identifies what he terms a glide from the Enlightenment to the sociological subject between the works of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, he fails to take into account that these two philosophers are discussing the concept within two different discourses. Locke’s memory theory of personal identity, which basically is an argument to the effect that we are the same person as far as our memory extends backwards in our lives, is to be distinguished sharply from the sociological subject he presents as the subject of the state in *Two Treatises of Government*, from 1690. The idea of memory as constitutive of personal identity is a metaphysical explanation towards the question of being, whereas Locke’s sociological subject only is the potential political subject of a model nation. Locke’s main contribution towards the metaphysical question of personal identity is

to be found in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, originally published in 1689. This is where he puts forward the idea that the unity of our memories is proof of our continued existence. Locke's general explanation of human understanding is that it is based on external impressions. We receive impressions from the outside world from which we build our picture of reality. Whereas Descartes turns inwards to find the answer to the question of being, Locke looks outwards: our idea of identity is based on impressions from the outside world – hence Locke has been termed an 'empiricist' in opposition to Descartes' rationalism. The important point of agreement between Locke and Descartes, however, is that they both believe that it is possible to come up with a finite answer to the question of identity. In contrast to Hall, Locke believes in the possibility of obtaining true insight.

Hall's lack of attention to differences in methods or approaches has other quite significant consequences for his overall argument about changing conceptions of personal identity. Already during his description of Locke, Hall states about the Lockean subject that 'He was the "subject" of modernity in two senses: the origin or "subject" of reason, knowledge, and practices; and the one who bore the consequences of these practices – who was "subjected" to them' (p.283).

This is Hall's first step onto a slippery slope, which will eventually, in my opinion, make his position untenable. The point being that yes, indeed, Locke writes about the subject as the origin of reason, knowledge and practices, and yes, he also writes on the subject as subjected to the consequences of these practices. But the former half belongs to his metaphysical writings whereas the latter falls under the headline of ethics and political philosophy. Of course Locke's philosophy both can and should be read as a systematic whole, but from that does not follow that Locke sees the subject as subjected to rules and practices as any kind of ontological necessity. In the essay 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power' Hall refers to Locke's statement that 'in the beginning all the world was America'³, and correctly identifies this as an evolutionary view. But I should like to make the important addition that this is only an evolutionary view with regard to sociology, certainly not ontology.

Of course, Hall is right insofar as he states that the subject has historically been conceptualised first as a metaphysical and later as a political entity, but again my objection is that we are talking about two entirely different kinds of approaches here, approaches that hardly are compatible. Locke writes his two treatises on government about how to make society function according to commonly accepted rules and laws, not about how man is by nature subjected to these laws - as a minimum any 'subject' in the political sense of the word has to give his tacit consent.

The same thing goes for Thomas Hobbes, where the issue is even more sharply distinguished, since Man, according to Hobbes, virtually has to suppress his ontological nature towards survival of the fittest, to be part of a non-violent model society. Of course, Hall is right in pointing out that with Hobbes we have a new emphasis tending more towards the sociological aspects of identity rather than the metaphysical ones. But Hall's implicit claim that *because* of changing societal conditions, the history of the subject *necessarily* had to follow suit, simply is not true. Again Hall grossly disregards the differences between the discourses in which this change was taking place. It may be that the sociological discourse came to dominate the scene, but this does not mean that it simply took over the ontological one, or that it was silenced forever (one just have to study the works of the American neo-empiricist philosopher Derek Parfit to see this).

Hence I do not think that the names of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes can be cited as proofs in a development view on the concept of personal identity. They are not building directly on a previous foundation, as for example the one laid out by Descartes. They are rather changing their focus on the concept, and are concerned with what persons and subjects are in a political setting, rather than a metaphysical one. In Locke's case, he writes of course on both issues, and obviously he cannot in his political philosophy disregard the findings of his ontological considerations, but on the other hand, he would certainly be horrified by the proposal that his political views should alter the basic ontological facts of personal identity. These discourses are not built on the same premisses and hence do not obey the same rules.

And as is the case with John Locke and Thomas Hobbes in Stuart Hall's development argument, so it is with the remainder of the theorists Hall describes as having radically altered the concept of personal identity. Of course, it is true to say that a theorist such as Sigmund Freud has profoundly influenced the way we think and talk about the person. I am certainly not denying that. But I should only like to question whether one could also say that Freud has changed what the person is? And to this, I claim, the only reliable answer must be a resounding NO. Calling himself a scientist as he did, I am rather sure Freud himself would agree, if he had the chance to comment. From his point of view, he has made an empirical discovery about - rather than a change in - what the person is.

Hall also mentions Ferdinand de Saussure, and he is of course the core example of a relationalist. Meaning arises *in relation to* the language code or structure we are operating within. But it is important to stress that Saussure is here concerned with the nature of *language* rather than that of personal identity. Of course the question of identity is part of language, but only identity in

the *idem* sense, that is, in the sense of countable material identity. This stands in contrast to the term *ipse*, meaning ‘he himself’, which denotes personal continued identity or existence. It is Hall’s claim that Saussure’s insight into the relational structure of language also bears on our conception of the person, but I must say that I totally disagree with this analogy. Saussure’s analysis of the *word* identity does not bring any news about the ontological concept of identity.

As mentioned earlier, Hall also lists Michel Foucault as an important factor in a changing conception of personal identity. If one follows Foucault’s line of reasoning, however, it appears that the subject is only decentered in an indirect but quite profound way. According to the argument in *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* (1975), the individual, and particularly the individual body, is increasingly being the subject of surveillance of modern extended and extensive administrative societal powers. Hence there is an increased focus on the individual, but not on the individual as person, but rather as body. One could say that attention is being diverted from the *ipse* to the *idem* aspect of the person.

The paradoxical conclusion, emanating from Foucault’s theories on the status of the modern subject, seems to be that, on the one hand, the individual subject is becoming less and less important, but on the other hand, this decreased importance is being replaced by an increase in symbolic significance or role-filling. There are certain discursive subject *positions* to be filled, the boundaries of which are quite sharply defined. In analogy with Foucault’s point about the increased surveillance of persons/bodies in modern society, one can say that despite the amounting interest in the *idem* aspect of the person, the *ipse* aspect is being systematically ignored. The conclusion to be drawn from this seems to be that Foucault’s theories do not present themselves as an unambiguous decentering of the subject.

Even if I now appear to have ventured deeply into one specific article on the subject of identity, I still believe this close scrutiny pays off, as Stuart Hall’s article not only is very central in the debate surrounding the conception of the ‘postmodern subject’, but also because his article is so comprehensive in that it includes a very broad number of influential thinkers on the subject.

I started by saying that the concept of personal identity was a contested issue within a variety of academic disciplines, and the views expressed by Stuart Hall do certainly not stand alone. For example the American sociologist Peter Berger propounds a similar view in his article ‘How to Acquire a Prefabricated Past’⁴. The title in itself should give a good indication of Berger’s view on identity. One can even find a resembling view in the writings of a philosopher such as the British

Martin Hollis in his article 'Of Masks and Men'⁵, which looks into the relation between person and role.

I shall abstain from calling all these theorists relativists, because it is such an ugly word in philosophical diction. But it is my claim that they all, and many other theorists with them within a broad spectre of academic disciplines, hold the view that the concept of identity is a *relational* one. Understood in the sense that what basically decides who we are, is our surroundings and how we relate to them, and hence identity becomes a malleable entity which we might impact on in certain ways, perhaps with certain aims in mind, such as for example political influence. The point I am trying to make is that it matters how we conceive of the concept of personal identity. In the vein of Michel Foucault, there are hidden power relations within any given discourse, and if we are not wary of how these power relations work, we might get trapped in them, and lured into thinking that our identity is something which it is not.

As such I see nothing wrong in holding a relationalist view on personal identity. Whether or not personal identity is something formed in relation to its 'Others', as it is popularly termed, is a question that should be addressed from a philosophical ontological perspective. But citing a number of theoretical predecessors from a variety of discourses, certainly does not constitute a proof that the relational view holds. Listing a number of discursive changes concerning the dominant mode of viewing personal identity, carries us nowhere concerning a proof of real ontological changes in the subject of these discourses. Quite apart from that, what in this development view is presented as the now extinct modes of thinking about personal identity, such as rationalism and empiricism, live on also today, for example in the works of the American neo-empiricist philosopher Derek Parfit⁶. So it is simply not true to say that personal identity was once a metaphysical entity, then it became a sociological factor and now it is a question of relations, and may in fact be replaced with the idea of identification. This is my basic claim, and in this I realise that I am opposing a number of influential theorists.

I also have a fair idea how these theorists might try to object to my standpoint. They would probably say that if this is my claim, how am I going to explain the concept of personal identity? To this I must regretfully reply that I have no solution to the question of what personal identity is, and if I did have a solution to what is at bottom the ancient question of essentialism vs. anti-essentialism, it would be quite a piece of news, indeed! Hence I seem to have pulled the rug from under my own feet.

Yet I do not think this entire explication of the concept of personal identity has been a waste of time, or that this discussion has led us nowhere. As I said, Stuart Hall lists Michel Foucault as an influential factor on the way we think and talk about personal identity. But another influential idea from Foucault is that of there being power relations within any given discourse. Because it is exactly in relation to the idea of power and discourse, I think the worth of my analysis of contemporary conceptions of personal identity shows itself.

When theorists such as Stuart Hall, Peter Berger, and others with them, hold a relationalist view on the question of what personal identity is, they do so more or less consciously because it fits their agenda. And this is where my analysis carries real interest for the present conference. Because when we ask what the culture in multiculturalism consists in, or what the difference of identities is, clearly many discourse participants would think of these questions as carrying political content. We might ask ourselves what kind of agenda we are really furthering when discussing something under this headline? Even if we are not attempting to form a new political party or consciously trying to set new standards for political correctness, we can be fairly sure that many listeners and readers would regard our joint conference headline as somewhat suspicious. And perhaps they are right to be suspicious! Certainly, the mere word 'multicultural' will turn on quite a few red lights among a number of contemporary politicians, and evidently voters as well. As Foucault says, there are power relations hidden within any discourse.

My objective then, has been to uncover the power relations buried in the discourse surrounding personal identity and by extension also the power relations buried within the discourses that use a relational conception of personal identity as an implied premiss in its argumentation. And it is my argument that a number of contemporary discourses use this kind of conception of personal identity. Returning to my humanistic background, this tendency is evident in for example the discourse surrounding the analysis of postcolonial literature, where the concept of identity often is politicised in a quite profound way. I am not saying that there is anything wrong in using a politicised conception of personal identity, I am only pointing out that when minority writers such as for example the Maoris of New Zealand or Aborigines of Australia speak of themselves as belonging to these ethnic groups, the kind of identity they are speaking about in these cases, is not the same kind of identity that was the subject of traditional philosophical investigation, such as the one conducted for example by Descartes. To push the point, one could say that these ethnic writers have chosen to identify with certain ethnic groups, but this does not mean that the essence of their identity lies in this identification. I realise that this is a controversial standpoint to hold, but none the

less, I shall maintain that legitimate or illegitimate as these identifications may be, they are still *identifications* rather than expressions of any unalterable fact of identity.

I started by saying that the concept of personal identity is a contested issue within a variety of academic disciplines. This variety makes it virtually impossible to come up with conclusive statements concerning its status within each of these disciplines. However, I do believe that a conceptual analysis as the one I have conducted here can serve as a model for a critical investigation of the concept as used in diverse current discourses - adjusting for variations between disciplines or discourses. There are in principle no limits to the types of concepts one could examine in a similar manner. I do realise that I am certainly not the first person to conduct such a conceptual analysis, *Begriffsgeschichte* is a well-established academic discipline, which the work of for example the German Dieter Teichert attests to⁷. Where I see the prospects for real academic innovation and improvement is when these conceptual analyses are applied to other disciplines rather than confined to philosophy and the history of ideas, which they stem from. In the specific case of a critical understanding of the use of 'identity' one might achieve a more nuanced view of the politics of representation that is at work both within for example literature itself and the critical approaches to it.

It may be that I have not reached any ultimate conclusion regarding the definition of the concept of personal identity - as I said, I have in one sense pulled the rug from under my own feet in this paper. Obviously the aim of traditional philosophical discourse has been to find such ultimate answers. It is the belief in ultimate answers that sparks the working interest of a philosopher like Descartes. This belief in ultimate answers does not appear to be shared by Stuart Hall, rather the entire motivation for his theories, perhaps most clearly seen in the article 'The Question of Cultural Identity', seems to be the relational formation of key concepts within cultural discourse. As such, both kinds of approaches to the issue are likely to colour the findings resulting from the investigations, and hence I repeatedly pointed out that awareness of the basic premisses of any such investigation is paramount in securing a balanced appreciation of what is presented as the truth in any discourse. In the words of another contributor to the debate, Martin Hollis, 'the hunt is affected by the hunters idea of the truth'.⁸

I do not believe that this standpoint lands me with the same problems I have pointed out are implicit within relativism. Rather, I believe this insight to offer an advanced position when it comes not only to the conceptual investigation of contested issues, but also when it comes to the use of these concepts in a variety of disciplines, where they may have status as contested sites. Saying with

Foucault that there are power relations implied in any discourse, does not necessarily mean that one also has to say with the post-structuralists that the signifier is arbitrarily floating and that meaning will never come to closure. Even this post-structuralist claim is a product of a contest for power, the rules of which one has to be aware of, to fully understand and appreciate the statements uttered within the discourse. It might pay off to ask exactly what kind of wittgensteinian *Sprechergemeinschaft* one is entering when engaged in academic (or for that matter everyday) discourse.

So it seems that I have merely come full circle, and am left with the observation that for all practical purposes we need a concept of identity. But the question of demarcation of this concept is perhaps best decided in the context in which it is used. As Wittgenstein asserted in *Philosophical Investigations*, 'meaning is use'.⁹ This, however, does not mean a total defeat concerning the initial goal of delimiting the concept of personal identity. Although it appears that we have merely come full circle, the detour has brought attention to the ways in which we think and talk about personal identity, and even if the result that 'meaning is use' may seem rather disappointing from a philosophical point of view, this has also placed us in an enlightened position concerning critical readings of how the concept can be used in different contexts. As mentioned above, the statement that meaning is use, for example by no means gives Hall *carte blanche* to carry out his dazzling jumps between different discourses. Even if we tentatively agree with Hall's *Begriffsgeschichte* as represented in 'The Question of Cultural Identity', it has become quite apparent that this leaves us in no privileged position concerning the proper use of the concept. I am not saying that there is something implicitly wrong in having a certain agenda within a particular discourse, only pointing out that in order for there to be fair play, all the players should be let in on the rules. To contest the dominant discourse, one has to point out to the participants what kind of *Sprechergemeinschaft* they are taking part of when engaged in this discourse.

This obviously does not answer the question of what personal identity *per se* is, and as such my analysis has not yielded any landslide results. But even if I have not solved the dispute of essentialism vs. anti-essentialism, I do think that my findings have relevance for how one should approach discourses in general, and claims about what personal identity is in particular.

My analysis can thus be applied very specifically to the use of the idea of personal identity within a variety of present discourses, but more generally my entire model for conceptual investigation can also be applied at a broader level to include overall arguments about essentialist or anti-essentialist uses of specific concepts within a variety of fields from philosophy over sociology

to cultural analysis and literary criticism. As such the present analysis should carry general interest for anyone concerned with pinpointing what power relations might be at work within a given discourse.

Presumably addressing myself here primarily to political scientists, it is perhaps less controversial to claim that there is a political dimension to cultural self-identification. But I have certainly often come across authors who down-right rejected that there should be any strategic significance to their claim to specific ethnic identities. As such I do not think that we can say that the politics of recognition is either a question of concrete needs arising from different cultural practices *or* a matter of emblems and status. Rather, status and emblems can be used in demanding a meeting of needs (perceived or real), and as such are sometimes adopted for strategic purposes. At least we would do ourselves a disservice if we did not recognise this strategic dimension as a possibility when it comes to speaking about identities, especially perhaps identities within a multicultural discourse.

I am not saying that we should stop using these terms and that this entire discourse is void. But to take up an idea from the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, one might argue that in order for there to be fair play within the discourse, the participants should be let in on the rules. Before entering any wittgensteinian *Sprechergemeinschaft* on multicultural theory, one should be made aware of the power relations implicit in the discourse, and what kind of causes are being furthered by speaking about concepts such as 'identity' and 'culture'. As Wittgenstein puts it, we have to establish in advance that it is the narrow end of the road sign that points towards the town we wish to travel to. If we are unaware of this fact, we cannot read the signs and hence will get lost on our way. And there certainly are a great deal of road signs to follow in present day multicultural discourse!

¹ This article appears in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures*, Polity Press, London, 1992.

² I do realise this is an extremely simplified version of Hobbes' idea of identity, but since this is the only aspect of his theory which has Hall's attention, I shall also limit myself to this.

³ Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power' in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (eds.), *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 312.

⁴ Peter Berger, 'How to Acquire a Prefabricated Past' in Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin (eds.), *The Experience of Philosophy*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, 1990.

⁵ Martin Hollis, 'Of Masks and Men' in Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes (eds.), *The Category of the Person. Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁶ See for example his book *Reasons and Persons*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984.

⁷ See for example Dieter Teichert, *Personen und Identitäten*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2000

⁸ Hollis, 1985, p.232.

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 1953, §43